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REVIEW

A MANUAL OF COMMON BEETLES OF EASTERN NORTH AMERICA, by ELIZABETH S. and LAWRENCE S. DILLON. Row, Peterson and Co., Evanston, 884 pp., clothbound, \$9.25.

It takes a long time to write a book; but it takes even longer to decide what is to be included in a book and what is to be left out. Those of us who have known of the Dillon and Dillon book have wondered just what would be left out. The advanced student of beetles is well aware of the tremendous task tackled by the Dillons. He knows that the word "common" must be used with extreme care. So it is no surprise that our ears pick up faint sounds from across the country as the mails are opened and exclamations of "at last" are heard. Those of you who have not yet seen the

book can relax. The Dillons have accomplished what they set out to do. In fact, they have exceeded their original goal by this production, and have given us a carefully selected set of species descriptions, illustrations, and keys which will be of great value to each and everyone of us whose main interest is beetles.

But the book will not do for us what you might think a reviewer has in mind when he makes the above sort of statements. Each specialist will pick up the book and moan about the omission of his favorite species. This is to be expected. He will never complain, however, when he goes into the local book store and sees a stock of this book. He will be pleased to see his name listed in the bibliography and happy at last to be able to defend his interest in beetles to the gen-

eral public on the same footing with the ornithologist, the malacologist, and the botanist. The public can now know what a beetle is and be aware of the aesthetic value of beetle study. In fact, I shall go farther, and predict that this book is the one single factor that will mark the turning point in the study of beetles in the New World.

The Old World has long ago put aside such immature notions that the study of beetles is to be confined to the odd and idle rich, or to psycho-ceramic Generals. They have long had an abundance of manuals for all levels of study of this subject. We never have had such a book before; we will never be without such a book again. This is the beginning. Many more will follow. The date 1961 marks for beetle study what 1934 marks for bird study. For this, we shall all be ever grateful to the Dillons!

To do my duty as a reviewer, I must turn now to a critical analysis of the book for the Coleopterist, whom I have not yet addressed in this review. First, I am not hunting for the errors. These, of course, should be searched out and brought to the attention of the authors and their public so that the next edition can be improved. I am sure that many can be found; no book of this nature can be without them.

The general format and binding is well done and shows the careful consideration of professional bookmakers. The organization of the book is logical. There is a brief introduction dealing with collecting methods, collection techniques, morphology, beetle larvae (which are not otherwise considered due to obvious space limitations), and a general discussion of beetle ecology. The bulk of the book is the systematic descriptions, keys, and illustrations, followed by a carefully selected bibliography which proceeds from general works to specific family bibliographies. The index is complete for families, genera, species, and common names. There is also a glossary of terms. The cover papers also illustrate the principle anatomical features of beetles.

The keys in this book have been simplified. The family key is to the 64 families treated in the book, only. There is no complete list of the families. The introduction is the only place that points out that many families and many species are omitted. Perhaps a checklist of the families, and some further indication of the omissions would have helped, without using much additional space. The

authors have avoided as many technical terms as possible, and have written their keys solely to the beetles included, so the beginner will always get an answer. We hope he will soon become aware that reliable determinations cannot be made in this manner.

The keys to genera and species draw heavily on color characters and on size. The generic and specific descriptions offset this feature by including more morphological features. We hope the student will make use of this before labelling his specimens.

When we turn to particular features, we see that the book suffers from a lack of critical review by specialists prior to publication. Just one example: in the description of the family Oedemeridae, it is stated that the tarsal claws are rarely dentate basally, yet, of the three genera included, two have toothed claws. This will be misleading to the user. We don't expect the authors to be acquainted with these details outside of their special groups. The specialists would have helped them, I feel sure. But these are the sorts of things the next edition will correct.

There is one very bad feature in this book. The authors have NOT used the correct generic names for many of the species. In their desire to simplify matters for the beginner, they have, by their own admission, lumped genera. This they have done on the basis of ease of recognition on sight by the beginner. They have not distinguished between genera that require the use of genitalic characters, for instance, or often between what might be called "close genera." For example, three genera are lumped under the name "Silpha." It is for this reason, then, that the book cannot be considered as a contribution to taxonomic literature. It should NOT be cataloged by revisers, nor should *Zoological Record* attempt to record this synonymy. We hope that the next edition will rectify this. Meanwhile we suggest that a complete checklist of the species be published, reflecting the proper and correct name for each.

Despite the above remarks addressed to the Coleopterists, we hope the book will be endorsed by all, and that full cooperation will be given to the Dillons by the specialists. Finally, we are happy to see that the book is dedicated to Dr. Henry Dietrich of Cornell University, a great tribute to a friend of all Coleopterists.

EDITOR